

Mark 6:30-34; 53-56

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.*

Jesus on Vacation - July 18, 2021

Mark 6:30-34; 53-56

You may have been hearing about an interesting phenomenon in the workplace. Employers are having a hard time finding employees and at the same time, people are quitting their jobs in record numbers. It's fascinating because there is still high unemployment in parts of the country, yet it seems that some people, at least, don't want to take the jobs that are out there.

Take a look around, so many employers are offering hiring bonuses. \$500 at Wawa. \$1000 at Amazon. Big box stores and fast food chains are raising their starting salaries. Still — few takers. You may have heard about the Infrastructure Bill in Congress which is supposed to help us fix our crumbling roads and even entitle everyone to two years of community college or post-high school training. But I wonder who is going to fill all those construction and teacher jobs if we can't fill what we've got now?

Yes, the reasons for the shortage of employees is partly explainable. Many people can't return to work because of Covid-related restrictions. Others would like to work, but can't find good child care. Of course, finding good child care means finding good child-care givers and so far, they just aren't out there.

But a larger thing is happening, happening for many of us. We are collectively burned out. It's hard to believe that the Covid crisis began for most of us just 15 months ago. It seems much longer than that. Fortunately, we in New Jersey have done a good job complying with vaccinations and social distancing so for us, life is almost back to normal. Personally, I'm hoping that the elementary school where I teach will let us go without masks in the fall, but that may be just a dream.

However, we know that for certain parts of our country, Covid is still very much a fact of daily life, whether they want to admit it or not. There are states where infection rates are soaring, raising stress and leaving those who care about science wondering what to do. It amazes me that there is actually a county in Missouri with high Covid rates and high denial rates where the Health Department has offered to visit people's homes in secret to vaccinate them so they won't be criticized by their neighbors.

Yes, we are burned out. The stress of these months, the masking, the absence from friends and family have all taken their toll. Add to that the pressure of living in a highly polarized society where some people are quick to believe anything social media or certain news channels tell them, we're just tired of having to fight the battle on so many fronts.

Of course, we can look at the rest of the world and realize that comparatively speaking, we are much better off in all categories, but it still does not relieve the constant pressure, does it?

We all need rest. We all need a vacation. We all need some sense of normalcy. We all need to get away from the endless bickering and lies. But at the same time, many of us have used this opportunity to evaluate our priorities in life. Some have found they like working from home, at least sometimes. Some studies have found that people can be just as productive or even more by skipping the hour plus commute.

Others have thought about what it is they actually do to earn and living and have concluded that they are tired of their job or feel unfulfilled in their work. They want to do something else. And really, why not?

My parents were depression babies. Yours probably were, or perhaps your grandparents. For them, fear and uncertainty were daily companions. At one point, my paternal grandfather was supporting 10 people on the salary of a park ranger in West Virginia! Then, of course, the Depression was followed by World War II and the fear of losing loved ones in battle or even the entire nation to Hitler.

Naturally, our parents grew up with the attitude that any work was better than no work. Take what you can get and be glad you're not starving. But now things have changed a bit. No doubt there are places where people have to do hard work for low pay to feed their families. However, many have a choice. So many are choosing to quit, reevaluate, rest, and set off in a new direction.

Quit and rest. Quit and rest. Jesus and his followers needed to quit and rest and that is what they tried to do in today's scripture.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus at this point in his ministry had become exceedingly popular. He was known as a healer. But more importantly, he was becoming known for his fresh and refreshing take on the teachings of his own Jewish faith. As the people constantly said, Jesus spoke with "authority." He transformed God's Word from being a rote set of boring rituals into something life changing and life affirming. Jesus was getting people excited. Jesus was showing people another way. In short, in a world where most people were feeling as burned out or even more burned out than we are right now, Jesus was a flame cutting through the malaise and fog of every day living. Jesus was spreading good news and his followers recognized what he was teaching as good news. More importantly, those who heard Jesus caught the spirit of the good news and began to really start believing it and really start living it.

Is it any wonder, then, that Jesus' apostles were so excited, so turned on, so energized by the words and actions of Jesus that they wanted to get involved and start sharing the good news themselves?

This is what the gospel is all about, friends! The Good News of Jesus is more, much more, much much more, than just coming to church. The Good News of Jesus has the power — and has had it for 2000 years — to take us from our lethargy, from our tiredness, from our world-weariness, from our state of being burned-out — and totally transform us.

What is the Good News about? What is Jesus about? What should this church be about? Friends, what all this is about is love — the enormous, powerful, incredible power of love. Love can change us all and individuals and love can, and does change the world!

The Good News is just this: God in Jesus Christ loves you, right now, as you are, with no exceptions or preconditions. Know this and never forget it: You are loved. You are important. You are special. The only thing God wants from you is to walk with God and learn how special you really are so you in turn to show others how special they are. When those first disciples of Jesus realized the Good News for themselves — when the first disciples truly believed that they were loved, special, people created by God for a wonderful purpose, what else could they do but go into the world and tell everyone! And that's what they did!

But now, the disciples were tired. Even Jesus was tired. Regardless of the joy of their mission, they still got tired and they needed to get away. As far as the disciples were concerned, they had the best job in the world: telling everyone about the love of God in Jesus Christ. But even they needed to rest.

And friends, if even the disciples needed to rest, if even Jesus needed to rest, we need to rest. Jesus told his followers that it was time to go on vacation. So they tried.

Look, the scripture itself says that Jesus did not have much of a vacation. Oh they all tried to get away, but they couldn't. It seems wherever they went, the crowds found them and would not leave them alone. Now on the one hand, that's good — the people wanted to hear what Jesus and his followers had to say. The people of course wanted to be healed. But Jesus made it clear that rest should supersede even the wonderful work of telling the Good News.

I mean, didn't God make that clear? In the very first chapter of Genesis, God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh. The point is not about literal 24-hour days, the point is that creation was a process and when the goal was achieved, God stopped and rested. God built

rest into the 10 commandments, which most of us, including me, violate where it says, “Honor the Sabbath Day and keep it Holy.” God really wants us to rest. God made provisions for farmers to rest their land every seven years. There was something called a Jubilee every 50 years where the whole nation was supposed to reset, relax, and take a national vacation. I don’t think Israel ever did it, but the plan was there. Human beings need rest. Jesus rested. The disciples rested. You and I are given permission by God to rest.

But do we? Many employers and bosses to expect people to work well beyond the normal 40 hours per week, isn’t it? Studies have shown time and again that human efficiency decreases considerably even after 35 hours of work. We get less done, we get tired, we feel burned out, we want to quit. Nevertheless, we keep going. It’s almost as if resting is a badge of shame we must avoid at all costs.

So is it any wonder that today in 2021 we have arrived at this situation where people just can’t or don’t want to go back to work? Other are quitting their jobs without necessarily having something else lined up. Employers are desperately recruiting without success. It seems we are craving our own Jubilee year, getting away from everything, trying to reset ourselves in the post-Covid world.

I don’t know if any of us get the right amount of rest. Each of us varies in how much our bodies need, just as we each have a built-in amount of sleep we should be getting each night. But one thing is clear: not resting ever is simply not an option. We may not get as much rest as we would like or even need, but God commands us to stop, stop, stop and get away from it all.

No question, that if you don’t like what you are doing in life, you owe it to yourself, you owe it to your family to stop and reevaluate what’s going on. You need to pray and ask God how else your talents and abilities can be used to benefit others and yourself. Even if you have the greatest job in the world and are immensely happy working, you still need to rest. You will be a better worker and contribute much more when your mind and body are in tune. And if you’re like most of us, a little glad about what we do, a little sad about what we do, we still need to stop, stop, and stop. Relax, reevaluate, and refresh.

Friends, these orders come from the top! Jesus says “Go on vacation!” No “Simon says”, Jesus says. Get away, go away, be away, both physically and mentally.

And then you can come back. Spiritually refreshed, physically sound, and mentally alert. It’s summertime and in the summer, we rest.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.